

CHAPTER II

THE UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT IN MYANMAR

In this chapter, the author breaks down the explanation into four parts. First, the author begins with the history of Myanmar from the military junta to the democratic state by describing each regime's period of time consecutively from the military junta in 1962 – 2010, the quasi-civilian government in 2011 – 2015, and the democratic government in 2016 – present. Second, the author argues that along with the history of Myanmar, women in Myanmar also strive and fight for their rights to be guaranteed and protected. The author also provides the data and information in the tables and figures on the underrepresentation of women in parliament during the election that held in 1990, 2010, the by-election in 2012, and the last election in 2015. Third, the author identifies what factors that hamper the women's participation in politics to contest the parliament seat in the election which clustered into four aspects namely socio-cultural aspect, educational aspect, economic aspect, and the legal and institutional aspect. In the last part of this chapter, the author argues that the underrepresentation of women in all spheres particularly politics had emerged the local women's movement in Myanmar that aimed to break and change the status quo.

A. The History of Myanmar: Military Junta to Democratic State

The history of Myanmar is most likely the same to the history of other third world countries in the Southeast Asia region, which struggled and gained their independence after the break down of the World War II. In fact, some of the third world countries had experienced the military junta regime, such as Brunei, Indonesia, Cambodia, Philippines, Vietnam, and even Thailand until today. As the third world country, and as influenced by its political history, Myanmar is still left behind from other

countries in Southeast Asia region with slow progress in terms of development.

Myanmar (ex. The Union of Burma), gained its independence in 1948 with U Nu as prime minister, after the colonization of British Empire in the nineteenth century. The Panglong Agreement was the cornerstone of Burma's independence from British Empire which signed by the Bogyoke Aung Sang, father of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the current *de facto* leader of Myanmar and the British in 1947 (EBO Myanmar, 2014). Burma began as a parliamentary democratic state like other independent neighboring countries in the region (Xu & Albert, 2016). In its early years, it was so turbulent where civil wars were broke down in the country. It triggered the military coup d'état which happened in 1962 led by General Ne Win to prevent the nation's disintegration (Women's Organizations of Burma Shadow Report Writing Committee, 1999).

1. Military Junta (1962 – 2010)

The military coup d'état was successful and General Ne Win assumed in office in 1962. On his hand, Burma led by the armed forces and turned into socialist country enforced by the inauguration of Burmese Way to Socialism through nationalizing the economy, forming a single-party system named Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP), and prohibited all independent newspapers (BBC, 2018). The junta government had adopted the 1974 Constitution which transferred the power from armed forces to the People's Assembly. Under this constitution, Ne Win was the elected President and appointed Sein Win as Prime Minister. In 1981, Ne Win resigned and succeeded by San Yu, but he remained as the party's leader. The adoption of 1974 Consitution did not change anything, other than the human rights violations and the negative changes of political, social and economic condition (Keling, Saludin, Feigenblatt,

Ajis, & Shuib, 2010). The economy of Burma was worsened and deteriorated rapidly as a result of Ne Win's policies, and a black-market economy (Xu & Albert, 2016). These alterations triggered the nationwide student-led pro-democracy uprising on 8 August 1988, or well-known as 8.8.88 uprising demanding the political reformation that killed at least three thousand people, and displaced thousands more (Women's League of Burma, 2008; Keling, Saludin, Feigenblatt, Ajis, & Shuib, 2010; Global Security, 2018). In restoring the situation and condition within the country, General Ne Win retired from the BSPP and Burma's Government formed the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) on 18 September 1988 led by Saw Maung and suspended the 1974 Constitution. It also prompted the implementation of open election system called The Democratization of Myanmar in 1990 (Keling, Saludin, Feigenblatt, Ajis, & Shuib, 2010). During this era, Burma has no operating constitution, not even one. The SLORC was in charge for every decision in the country.

The 1990 election was not an actual election as a way to realize the democratic state. In the election held on 27 May 1990, the National League of Democracy (NLD), the political party led by Aung San Suu Kyi won the election more than 80% vote and ashamed the military junta regime. After being defeated by Aung San Suu Kyi's party, the military neglected the winning of NLD and arrested Aung San Suu Kyi as the first women leader in Myanmar who obtained the majority of support in the election for an unacceptable reason of being misbehaved. Later, the elected MPs were also arrested, imprisoned, forced to resign by the military (Women's League of Burma, 2006).

The SLORC failed to gain the trust of the people post-1990 election. The chairman of SLORC, Saw Maung was succeeded by Than Shwe in 1992. In 1993, the formulation of the new constitution took place after the dismissal of the 1974 Constitution. The SLORC

established National Convention (NC) for drafting a new constitution aimed for solidifying the military power. The NC comprised of 702 delegates by which the 596 delegates were chosen by the generals, and the rest 106 delegates were the elected representatives. In 1995 the elected representatives walked out from NC due to the procedure changes hindering the pro-democratic constitution and later the NC expelled the 86 delegates from NLD due to their walkout. This led to the student demonstrations and political activities boycotted the convention in 1996 causing the severe crackdowns and the adjournment of the NC. In 1997, the SLORC was renamed into State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) with Than Shew remained to chair the council for reinvigorating its central committee, rebuilding its international image, and redefining its stance on human rights. In the same year, Burma became a member of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) which somehow being criticized by the international community (Women's Organizations of Burma Shadow Report Writing Committee, 1999). Burma had increased its presence at international level, despite its resistance against the domestic and international pressure.

The second stage of drafting the new constitution was initiated in 2003 by recalling the NC. The second drafting process had resulted in a chaotic situation between the government and the opposition, particularly NLD. The SPDC received the international condemnation for the crackdowns and placing Aung San Suu Kyi again under house arrest following the Depayin Massacres carried out by the Union Solidarity Development Association (USDA). In tackling the international pressure, the SPDC announced the “Seven Step Roadmap to Democracy.” In the following event, the Saffron Revolution was broke out on September 2007 which resulted in the brutal assault and killings against peacefully protesting monks and pro-democracy protestors (Human Rights Watch, 2008; Women's League

of Burma, 2008). In amidst of massive protests against SPDC, the drawn out convention was concluded. In October 2007, the SPDC appointed the other 54 members of State Constitution Drafting Commission to complete the process yet excluding the NLD and other independent political parties. Shortly afterwards, in February 2008, the SPDC announced that the referendum will be held in May 2008, to be followed by the election in 2010 and the Union Election Commission (UEC) was established (Human Rights Watch, 2008; Bunte, 2014).

2. Quasi-Civilian Government (2011 – 2015)

In March 2011, the SPDC administration was dissolved and handed over power to the elected civilian government headed by President Thein Sein (Bunte, 2014). Prior to the new administration took into office in 2011, the 2010 general election became the mark of a historic transition from military rule to civilian government (Latt, Ninh, Myint, & Lee, 2017). The election on 7 November 2010 was a fifth stage of the Seven Steps Roadmap to Democracy (Burma Campaign of UK, 2010). It was later becoming a mandate under the 2008 Constitution which considered military bias election even some said that it was another fake election held by Myanmar's Government just to lessen the threat and pressure from the international community following the Depayin Massacre in 2003. The 2010 election was dominated and won by the Union Solidarity Development Party (USDP, USDA earlier) as the military-backed party. The NLD, without Suu Kyi's presence, decided not to participate in the election but demanded the recognition of the results obtained in the 1990 election (Ribeiro & Vierira, 2016). Aung San Suu Kyi was just released six days later from the election on 13 November 2010.

The quasi-civilian government was not the real representation of a democratic state, yet it was on the path towards a democratic state. The military power remained

to dominate the government indirectly which enforced by the 2008 Constitution. The 2008 Constitution, in the very first place, was formulated for preserving the domination of military forces (*Tatmadaw*) in the government. It can be seen clearly from two important features: 25% of seats in the Assembly of the Union (*Pyidaungu Hluttaw*) in the national level which divided into the House of Nationalities (*Amyotha Hluttaw*) and House of Representatives (*Pyithu Hluttaw*); and state/regional level are reserved for the military, and the national security issues are handled by the NDSC comprising 11 members (Burma Campaign of UK, 2010; Ribeiro & Vierira, 2016).

Despite the domination of military power cannot be eliminated, the elected President Thein Sein was very concerned about political and economic reforms. Reconciliation moved forward with the pro-democracy forces (Nakanishi, 2013). In 2012, President Thein Sein made the promise to the United Nations General Assembly that Myanmar won't hold back from democracy (BBC, 2014). The government had freed the political prisoners, relaxed the restriction against media, and persuaded Aung Sang Suu Kyi and the NLD to rejoin the political process (BBC, 2012). At the same year on 1 April, Myanmar's Government held the by-election to fill 48 seats which divided into 46 seats in the national parliament and 2 seats in State/Region parliament. During the by-election, ASEAN, the European Union (EU), the United Nations, and the United States became the observers (Martin, 2012). It was reported that the by-election was largely free and fair. The NLD participated in the by-election and won 45 contested seats, so did Aung San Suu Kyi (BBC, 2012). The government also started discussing the ceasefire agreement with the ethnic groups. In terms of economic reform, President Thein Sein was succeeded to reduce the country's poverty rate below 22% (Chongkittavorn, 2017). The Asian Development Bank resumed loans to Myanmar to foster

its social and economic development (BBC, 2015). The progressive political and economic reform in Myanmar under Thein Sein's administration encouraged the international community to lift their sanction to Myanmar.

In this era, the presence of Myanmar at the regional and international level required the progressive development within the country. In 2014, Myanmar chaired the ASEAN with the support from all ASEAN member states (Prakash, 2013; ASEAN, 2013). The development of Myanmar was getting more visible. In the following year, Myanmar held its first open general election with the opposition parties participated on 8 November 2015.

3. Transitioning Democratic Regime (2016 – present)

The democratic regime was marked by the open general election which all main political parties participated (The Carter Center, 2015). Various actions have been taken by existing Myanmar's Government to develop its country and to fit in the international community. The 2015 elections were not the final process of Myanmar's democratization and transformation; instead, it was a starting point for the better democratization in Myanmar (Thuzar, 2015). In this era, under the 2008 Constitution, the military force of Myanmar remains powerful in the country through the 25% reserved seats for military forces in parliament and the existing NDSC as the highest authority in the Government of Myanmar.

In the 2015 election, the political contestation was largely focused on the two dominant parties, USDP and NLD. In fact, NLD won the election victoriously in both the parliament at national and state/regional level which took almost exactly the same amount of contested seats around 80% (Fisher, 2015). Although Aung San Suu Kyi won the election, she has no chance to be a legitimate

president of Myanmar as the implication of the 2008 Constitution (Barker, 2015). The 2008 Constitution, according to Chapter 3, No. 59(f) it obliged the president must not owe allegiance to a foreign power; and Chapter 3 No 57(d) it obliged the president must have military experience. Aung San Suu Kyi then became the *de facto* leader of Myanmar and positioned herself as the State Counsellor. Therefore, the *de jure* head of government, President Htin Kyaw was elected within the Assembly of the Union. The previous administration handed over the power to the winning party smoothly on 30 March 2016. Due to his health issue, President Htin Kyaw resigned from his power and succeeded by his deputy, Myint Swe on 21 March 2018 until the new president was selected by the Assembly of the Union no later than seven days of the resignation of President Htin Kyaw under the 2008 Constitution (DW, 2018). The new elected President of Myanmar is President Win Myint from the ruling party. Earlier in the ruling administration, he acted as the Speaker of House of Representatives. He was put forward in the President candidacy and won the election in the assembly (DW, 2018). President Win Myint took into office on 30 March 2018. Less than a month after he assumed in office, he granted the amnesty to 8,500 prisoners in Myanmar on 17 April 2018 (VOA News, 2018). However, being more democratic in political manner does not guarantee that all people in Myanmar are living in peace without conflict. Indeed, Myanmar stuck in the situation that the government is accused by the international community for the human rights violation against Muslim Rohingya.

In line with the history of Myanmar from the very authoritarian regime under the military rulers to the more democratic regime, the author highlights the struggle of women fighting for their rights during those periods, particularly political rights. In presenting the women's struggle for their political rights, in the next part, the author showcases the development of women's

representation in Myanmar's Parliament from the election in 1990, 2010, 2012 by-election and 2015.

B. Women's Representation in Parliament: Election 1990, 2010, 2012 and 2015

From the aforementioned history of Myanmar, it can be prejudiced that women in Myanmar have been struggling fighting for their rights, particularly the political rights to be the representative in parliament. In the history of Myanmar, Myanmar's women actively engaged and participated in the protest against the military regime. Not to mention, Aung San Suu Kyi is an important female figure in Myanmar who has been fighting for political reform in the country. There were significant numbers of women who contributed to the realization of political reform in the country. However, it remains difficult for women to have the leadership position in the country at the local and national level. Women were, are, and will always be struggling for their political rights, particularly to become the representative in parliament. Yet, the author believes that Myanmar's women began to enjoy the political rights, particularly to be the representatives in parliament.

1. The 1990 Election: Dark Ages for Women in Parliament

Following the massive protests and uprisings in the late 1980s, there were some women in Myanmar were encouraged to be involved in politics in particular. The SLORC promised to implement the open election on 27 May 1990. The election was the first multi-party elections since 1960 participated by 93 political parties. The election had 492 constituencies with 485 contested seats and the other 7 seats suspended for security reasons. The contested seats were only for representing the people in the House of Representatives. Figure 2.1 shows the

general statistics of elections (Han, MP-NLD, & Yenangyaung, 2000).

Figure 2.1 General Statistics of the 1990 Elections

Number of constituencies	:	492	
Number of eligible voters	:	20,818,313	(100%)
Number of vote cast	:	15,112,524	(72.6%)
Number of valid vote cast	:	13,253,606	(63.7%)
Number of registered parties	:	235	
Number of participating parties	:	93	
Number of total candidates	:	2,296	(100%)
Number of total women candidate	:	84	(3.65%)
Number of total men candidate	:	2,212	(96.35%)
Number of candidates from parties	:	2,209	
Number of independent candidates	:	87	
Number of elected seats	:	485	(100%)
Number of total elected women candidates	:	15	(3.09%)
Number of total elected men candidates	:	470	(97.91%)
Number of elected candidates from parties	:	479	
Number of elected independent candidates	:	6	

The Aung San Suu Kyi-led pro-democracy political party, NLD won the election victoriously accounted around 80.82% or equaled to 392 seats out of 447 fielded candidates. Meanwhile, the National Unity Party (NUP) the nearest rival of NLD only won 10 seats out of 413 fielded candidates. For more detailed election result, table 2.1 shows the election result compiled in the documentation made by Democratic Voice of Burma (Han, MP-NLD, & Yenangyaung, 2000; Tonkin, 2008).

Table 2.1 Result of the 1990 Election

No	Political Party	No. of candidates	No. of seats won	% of 485 contested	No. of elected women	% of 485 contested
1	National League for Democracy	447	392	80.82	15	3.09
2	Shan	58	23	4.74	-	-

	Nationalities League for Democracy					
3	Arakan League for Democracy	25	11	2.27	-	-
4	National Unity Party	413	10	2.06	-	-
5	Mon Democratic Front	19	5	1.03	-	-
6	Miscellaneous parties	1,247	49	10.10	-	-
7	Independents	87	6	1.24	-	-
	Total	2,296	485	100	15	3.09

Figure 2.1 shows that women candidates also still far away quantitatively than the men candidates. There were only 84 women candidates out of 2,296 candidates. It was no doubt that women were undermined by the government in the political realm. Table 2.1 above also clearly shows that women in Burma were struggling for becoming the representatives in the parliament even after they candidate themselves. The elected women were only accounted for around 3% of the total elected MPs. All the elected women MPs were coming from NLD, table 2.2 shows the list of elected women MPs from NLD with its represented constituency (Han, MP-NLD, & Yenangyaung, 2000).

Table 2.2 The Elected Women MPs in the 1990 Election

No	Elected Women MP	Constituency
1	Daw Sein Tin	Shwegu – Kachin State
2	Nan Khin Htwe Myint	Pa-an (3) – Karen State
3	Daw Khin Htay Kywe	Chaungzong (2) – Mon State
4	Daw Tin Saw Oo	Mudon (1) – Mon State
5	Daw May Phyo	Namtu – Shan State
6	Daw Sel Sel	Hkamti – Sagaing Division
7	Daw Khin San Hlaing	Wetlet (2) – Sagaing Division
8	Daw Hla Hla Moe	Minhla (2) – Pegu Division
9	Daw May Hnin Kyi	Mogok (1) – Mandalay

		Division
10	Daw Ohn Kyi	Myittha (1) – Mandalay Division
11	Daw San San	Seikkan – Rangoon Division
12	Daw San May	Taikkya (2) – Rangoon Division
13	Daw May Win Myint	Mayangone (2) – Rangoon Division
14	Daw Khin Aye Myint	Yankin – Rangoon Division
15	Dawn San San Win	Ahlong – Rangoon Division

2. The 2010 Election: Moving Forward to Democracy

The transfer of power from the military regime to the civilian government was the essence of the 2010 election held on 7 November 2010. The adoption of the 2008 Constitution somehow had changed the posture of the election held in 2010. According to the 2008 Constitution, the election was aimed to elect the member of the parliament at national and 14 state/region parliament level. In the union-level parliament, it is divided into the House of Representatives and the House of Nationalities. The election was contested the 75% seats of the total seats in both parliaments at national and state/regional level, and the rest 25% of the total seats were reserved for military appointees. The third four seats of parliament or equal to 498 seats are to be elected by universal suffrage with the composition of 330 MPs in the House of Representatives, and 168 MPs in the House of Nationalities. The rest a quarter seats or equal to 166 seats for the military-appointed MPs (Egreteau, 2017; The Carter Center, 2015). Meanwhile, in the state/region level, the number of seats in each state/regional parliament depends on the township's amount with 2 MPs for each township constituency. The state/region parliament also will be filled by the military-appointed MPs as the same percentage as in the union-level parliament. To ensure the election process runs smoothly, the UEC was established on 8 March 2010 mandated by

the Union Election Commission Law although women still underrepresented in the commission.

The reports on the 2010 election showed that there were more eligible voters participated although the numbers of participating political parties were decreasing compared to the 1990 election. In addition, the contested seats also more than doubled the contested seats in the previous election. Figure 2.2 shows the general statistics of the 2010 election (Egreteau, 2017; Gender Equality Network, 2012; Toshihiro, 2011).

Figure 2.2 General Statistics of the 2010 Elections

Number of constituencies	:	1,171	
Number of eligible voters	:	29,021,608	100%
Number of valid vote cast			
House of Representatives	:	22,421,123	77.26%
House of Nationalities	:	22,283,465	76.68%
State/Region Parliaments	:	22,230,552	76.66%
Number of registered parties	:	47	
Number of participating parties	:	37	
Number of total candidates	:	3,053	(100%)
Number of total women candidate	:	114	(3.73%)
Number of total men candidate	:	2,939	(96.27%)
Number of candidates from parties	:	2,989	
Number of independent candidates	:	64	
Number of total elected candidate	:	1,152	(100%)
Number of total elected women candidates	:	43	(3.73%)
Number of total elected men candidates	:	1,109	(96.27%)
Number of elected candidates from parties	:	1,146	
Number of elected independent candidates	:	6	

It can be described by comparing figure 2.1 and figure 2.2 that the women candidate and the elected women candidate in the 2010 election were increasing in number although it was not significant. The author compiled the result of the 2010 election from various sources and presented it in table 2.3 (Humanitarian Information Unit, 2012; Centre for Peace and Conflict

Studies, 2011; Toshihiro, 2011; Burma Fund UN Office, 2011).

Table 2.3 Results of the 2010 Election

No	Political Party/Military/Independent	Fielded Candidates					Elected Candidates			
		HR	HN	S/R	E	Total	HR (W/M)	HN (W/M)	S/R (W/M)	Total (W/M)
1	Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)	314	155	625	17	1111	6/253	3/126	14/479	23/858
2	National Unity Party (NUP)	298	147	518	10	971	0/12	0/5	0/46	0/63
3	Shan National Democratic Party	45	14	106	4	169	1/17	0/3	6/31	7/51
4	National Democratic Force (NDF)	99	35	22	0	156	1/7	1/3	0/4	2/14
5	Democratic Party (Myanmar)	22	9	15	0	46	0/0	0/0	2/1	2/1
6	88 Generation Student Youths (Union of Myanmar)	29	6	5	0	40	0/0	0/0	0/1	0/1
7	Miscellaneous Parties	140	137	211	8	496	5/22	0/26	1/70	6/118
8	Independents	37	6	21	0	64	0/1	0/1	0/4	0/6
Total		984	509	1523	39	3053	13/312	4/164	23/636	40/1112
Military Appointed MPs (W/M)		-	-	-	-	-	0/110	0/56	0/220*	0/386
Cancelled		-	-	-	-	-	0/5**	-	-	0/5
Total (W/M)							13/427	4/220	23/856	40/1503
Total							440	224	879	1543
Women MPs % of Elected MPs							4%	2.4%	3.49%	3.47%
Women MPs % of Total MPs							2.9%	1.8%	2.7%	2.6%

Details:

HR : House of Representatives
 HN : House of Nationalities
 S/R : State/Region Parliament
 E : Ethnic

W/M : **Women/Men**

*data is unavailable, the author predicted the number as the 2008 Constitution granted military-appointed MPs 1/3 of parliament seats based on the numbers of elected MPs. The author also refers to the data of by-election in 2012 that there were 222 military appointees in the State/Region Parliaments

**Shan States canceled 5 seats in the parliament

The author noticed that various sources provided the different data and information; hence there is the difference of numbers of elected women presented in figure 2.2 and table 2.3. Yet, the author signifies that women in the 1990 election were not well-represented. Apparently, there were no women military-appointed MPs which formed an imbalance posture of parliament between men and women MPs.

3. The 2012 By-Election: The Return of Opposition Party

The 2008 Constitution mandated the government to hold the by-election for filling the vacant seats in the parliament as those MPs were appointed to the Government of Myanmar. The 2012 by-elections held on 1 April 2012 with 48 constituency seats, but there were only 45 seats contested. The 2012 By-Election in Myanmar was possible due to the unique features of the 2008 Constitution which attracted the foreign countries and the international community to observe the running of the election (Than T. M., 2013). During the by-election, ASEAN, the European Union (EU), the United Nations, and the United States became the observers (Martin, 2012). Figure 2.3 shows the general statistic of the 2012 by-elections (Martin, 2012; Gender Equality Network, 2012).

Figure 2.3 General Statistics of the 2012 By-Elections

Number of constituencies	:	48
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Number of participating parties	:	17
Number of total candidates	:	157 (100%)
Number of total women candidate	:	24 (15.3%)
Number of total men candidate	:	133 (84.7%)
Number of total elected candidate	:	45 (100%)
Number of total elected women candidates	:	13 (28.9%)
Number of total elected men candidates	:	32 (71.1%)

In the by-election of 2012, the opposition party, specifically, the NLD was rejoined and participated in political contestation. Prior to the by-election of 2012, President Thein Sein met Aung Sang Suu Kyi, the NLD Leader for putting aside the ego of each and decided to work together for the public's good. Through this by-election, women were given the better chance to participate in politics and registered to be the representatives in parliament. The detail of the result of 2012 by-election showed in table 2.4 (Gender Equality Network, 2012; Latt, Ninh, Myint, & Lee, 2017).

Table 2.4 Result of the 2012 By-Election

No	Political Party	Fielded cand(s)	Seats won			
			HR (W/M)	HN (W/M)	S/R (W/M)	Total (W/M)
1	National League for Democracy	44	12/25	0/4	1/1	13/30
2	Union Solidarity Development Party	48	0/0	0/1	0/0	0/1
3	Miscellaneous parties and Independents	65	0/0	0/1	0/0	0/1
Total (W/M)		157	12/25	0/6	1/1	13/32
Total		157	37	6	2	45

The NLD won the by-election of 2012 with 43 seats out of 44 contested seats. The USDP and Shan National Democratic Party won 1 seat each in the House of Nationalities. All elected women MPs were coming

from the NLD and increasing the number of women's representation in parliament. The result of the 2012 by-election reconfigured the composition of the elected MPs of 2010 election in the parliament both at national and state/region level. The new composition of MPs post-2012 by-election showed in table 2.5 (Gender Equality Network, 2012).

Table 2.5 Composition of Women MPs Post-2012 By-Election

Parliament	2012 By-Election					Women MPs % of Elected MPs	Women MPs % of Total MPs
	Women Elected MPs	Total Elected MPs	Women Military Appointees	Total Military Appointees	Total MPs		
House of Representatives	25	322*	0	110	432	7.8%	5.7%
House of Nationalities	4	168	0	56	224	2.4%	1.8%
Assembly of the Union	29	490	0	166	656	6.0%	4.4%
State/Region Parliaments	24	663	0	222	885	3.6%	2.7%
Total	53	1,153	0	388	1,541	4.6%	3.4%

The post-2012 By-Election had increased the women's representation in parliament in Myanmar. A couple years following the 2012 by-election, there were 2 female military officers appointed to be the MPs in the House of Representatives, giving women from military forces more opportunity to be involved in decision making (Radio Free Asia, 2014). The participation of NLD in political contestation which opened up more opportunities for women to be involved in politics was evident to the more inclusive political environment for women although still far away from the global average.

4. The 2015 Election: The Victory of Democracy

The 2015 election became the first open general election with all political parties, including the opposition party, the NLD. The election which held on 8 November 2015 was a milestone in the transition process started in 2011. In the previous 2010 election, the democratic transition was highly controlled by the military power. In this period, the election was more relaxed and peaceful although there were many demonstrations seeking for democratization, particularly the NLD. Everyone was very enthusiast welcoming the election which decides the future of Myanmar and its people. Figure 2.4 shows the general statistic of the 2015 election (EMR, 2015; Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, 2017; Egreteau, 2017; Latt, Ninh, Myint, & Lee, 2017; Transnational Institute, 2015).

Figure 2.4 General Statistic of the 2015 Election

Number of constituencies	:	1,171	
Number of eligible voters	:	>32 millions	
Number of registered parties	:	93	
Number of participating parties	:	91	
Number of total candidates	:	6,072	(100%)
Number of total women candidate	:	803	(13.2%)
Number of total men candidate	:	5,269	(86.8%)
Number of candidates from parties	:	5,762	
Number of independent candidates	:	310	
Number of total elected candidate	:	1,121	(100%)
Number of total elected women candidates	:	151	(13.5%)
Number of total elected men candidates	:	970	(86.5%)
Number of elected candidates from parties	:	1,117	
Number of elected independent candidates	:	4	

It is mentioned in some notable sources that the 2015 election was the historical repetition of the winning of NLD in the 1990 election. The NLD won almost slightly 80% of the contested seats in the election. The military-backed party, USDP which was the ruling party during the quasi-civilian regime under President Thein Sein was defeated by NLD and only accounted only 10% of the election. The author compiled

the sources regarding the result of 2015 election which presented in table 2.6 (EMR, 2015; Ministry of Labour, Immigration and Population, 2017; Egretau, 2017; Latt, Ninh, Myint, & Lee, 2017; Transnational Institute, 2015).

Table 2.6 Result of the 2015 Election

No	Political Party/ Military/ Independent	Fielded Candidates					Elected Candidates			
		HR (W/ M)	HN (W/ M)	S/R (W/ M)	Total (W/ M)	Total	HR	HN	S/R	Total
1	National League for Democracy	49/ 269	23/ 140	95/ 554	167/ 963	1,130	255	135	476	866
2	Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)	20/ 298	10/ 154	39/ 607	69/ 1,059	1,127	30	11	73	114
3	National Unity Party	23/ 183	11/ 87	50/ 403	84/ 673	757	0	1	0	1
4	National Development Party	28/ 105	11/ 50	24/ 135	63/ 290	353	0	0	0	0
5	Miscellaneous Parties (87 parties)	107/ 573	65/ 293	229/ 1,127	401/ 1,993	2,394	37	19	80	136
6	Independents	7/ 83	0/ 42	12/ 166	19/ 291	310	1	2	1	4
Total		1,745	886	3,441	6,072		44/ 279	23/ 145	84/ 546	151/ 970
Total Elected MPs							323	168	630	1,121
Military Appointed MPs (W/M)							2/ 108	0/ 56	2/ 219	4/ 383
Cancelled							0/7	0/0	0/14	0/21
Total MPs (W/M)							46/ 394	23/ 201	86/ 779	155/ 1,374
Total MPs							440	224	865	1,529

Comparing figure 2.4 and figure 2.2 as well as analyzing table 2.6 signify the election of 2015 held in Myanmar had a quite significant change on women's participation in politics by becoming the candidate for the MPs and women's representation in parliament as the

elected MPs. As the 2012 by-election took into place, the largest opposition pro-democracy party in Myanmar was able to participate and won the majority seats. Earlier, women's participation was even far below the 30% minimum of gender quota or global average. Later, in the 2015 election, the women's participation and representation in parliament were increased as in accordance with the democratization process in Myanmar which reached 10.5%. Table 2.7 is for presenting the outlook of Myanmar's women in parliament post-2015 election (Latt, Ninh, Myint, & Lee, 2017).

Table 2.7 Women in Parliament: Post-2015 Election

Parliament	2015 Election					Women MPs % of Elected MPs	Women MPs % of Total MPs
	Women Elected MPs	Total Elected MPs	Women Military Appointees	Total Military Appointees	Total MPs*		
House of Representatives	44	323	2	110	433	13.62%	10.6%
House of Nationalities	23	168	0	56	224	13.7%	10.3%
Assembly of the Union	67	491	2	166	657	13.64%	10.5%
State/Region Parliaments	84	630	2	221	851	13.3%	10.1%
Total	151	1,121	4	387	1,508	13.5%	10.2%

*excluding the cancelled seats

The development of the parliamentary system in Myanmar as the country is also getting more democratic resulted in the improvement of numbers of women's participation in candidacy and women's representation in parliament. Nevertheless, the men still dominate 90% of parliaments in union and state/region level, and women remain underrepresented in the parliament. In the next part, the author describes the factors that hamper women's representation in parliament in Myanmar.

C. The Factor of Women’s Underrepresentation in Parliament in Myanmar

In 2015, Myanmar has gained a better reputation from international communities ever since. The election was considered as fairer and freer in compare to the previous election held in 2010 and 2012 by-election (Burma Campaign UK, 2015). Women’s participation in the political contestation was increasing quite significant. Nevertheless, the women’s representation in parliament still remained unjust as women only made up 10% of the total MPs. This number is still far away from the 30% target agreed by the international community. Myanmar is still categorized among 70 countries worldwide that have less than 15% women in parliament (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2015 in Murage, 2017). However, the author also reaffirms that the progress has been made in Myanmar for increasing the representation of women in parliament to date. The development of women’s representation in Myanmar’s Parliament from the 1990 election to the 2015 election can be seen in table 2.8.

Table 2.8 The Development of Women’s Representation* in Myanmar’s Parliament (1990-2015)

	1990 Election			2011-2016			2016-2021		
	Women MPs	Total MPs	%	Women MPs	Total MPs	%	Women MPs	Total MPs	%
Assembly of the Union	15	485	3.09	30	632	4.75	69	657	10.50
House of Representative	-	-	-	26	417	6.23	46	433	10.62
House of Nationalities	-	-	-	4	215	1.86	23	224	10.26
State/Region Parliament	-	-	-	26	881	2.95	86	880	9.77
Total	15	485	3.09	56	1,513	3.70	155	1,537	10.08
*Military-appointed MPs are included									

The progress made after 2 decades from the 1990 election was not really visible. In fact, in the 2010 election, the 2008 Constitution of Myanmar was adopted and changed the electoral processes and mechanism, as well as its legal framework. The constitution has been discouraging the political reform in the country, due to its tendency to solidify the military power through the NDSC. The numbers of women had participated in the election, yet they were not given an equal chance as men to be voted. In five years later, the election was held again by having the first open general election participated by the opposition party at large, particularly NLD after 25 years. Despite, the quantity of women's representation in parliament was increasing in numbers men still dominate the parliament. by assuming 90% of parliament's seats.

Before the author goes further, it is important for the author not to be biased; hence it is necessary to describe the attempt made by Myanmar's Government regarding this issue. Prior to 1990 Election, Myanmar's Government marginalized women in all spheres until Myanmar acceded to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1997 (Gender Equality Network, 2013). The Government of Myanmar submitted its initial report to the CEDAW Committee in 1999 which reviewed at the 22nd Session (Women's League of Burma, 2008). By that, Myanmar was supposed to be upholding the CEDAW norms granting the protection and promotion of women's rights. However, the SPDC did not do anything for obliging the norms until the quasi-civilian government took in office and made some notable signs of progress in increasing the status of women. For its first and foremost, the Government of Myanmar under the Myanmar National Committee for Women's Affairs (MNCWA) in the Ministry of Social Welfare, Relief and Resettlement (MSWRR) released the National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) in October 2013 (UNDP, 2013). The national strategic plan was a part of

the commitment of Myanmar's Government for ratifying two global treaties; CEDAW and Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action (BPfA). One of the strategic objectives targeted in the NSPAW is to increase the women's participation in decision-making, including in the parliament. Nonetheless, the implementation of the NSPAW was considered inefficient and ineffective, a false hope promises not a progress and falls short of gender equality and CEDAW and BPfA (GJC & Leitner Center, 2015).

By that, the author in this part questioned the factors of the underrepresentation of women in Myanmar's Parliament. Gender Equality Networks (2015) mentioned that there are some factors which shape the opportunities for both women and men to be the representative in parliament. The author reiterates and reinvestigates those factors of women's underrepresentation in parliament which simplified into four clusters; socio-cultural aspect, educational aspect, economic aspect as well as legal and institutional aspect. Those aspects underpin each other; henceforth increasing women's representation in parliament is not an easy work.

1. Socio-Cultural Aspect

Some studies in both developed and developing countries found that the citizens tend to be male-bias in choosing the political leader or representatives (Aniza & Berry, 2012; Duflo, 2012 in Gender Equality Network, 2015). It also inevitably exists among Myanmar's citizen that they prefer men over women to be the political leader (The Asia Foundation, 2014; Gender Equality Network, 2013). The male-bias is evident to the longstanding preservation of patriarchal system in the society of Myanmar. The patriarchal system, the system which gives men superiority over women in all aspects is simply marginalizing and disadvantaging women by neglecting

their presence. It has been accustomed in Myanmar society that divides the social and gender roles of women and men (Hedstrom, 2013). There is a belief amongst the Myanmar society saying that women are not only expected to taking care of children but also in charge to assure the well-being of all family members (Mra, 2000 in Belak, 2002). There are numbers of traditional Myanmar proverbs that hindering the women's role in public leadership roles (Gender Equality Network, 2013). Therefore, women are being consciously and voluntarily to be assigned in domestic matters, and men in public matters. In general, women's responsibility in the family is the house and the men's is earning money for the family (Belak, 2002). In addition, women are given a role to be the culture preservers which altering their chance to empower themselves in all spheres, including the political sphere. The preservation of the patriarchal system, according to the feminists is the prominent obstacle to an equal environment for both men and women in the political institution (Lian, 2015). It can be worsened by the enforcement of patriarchal system through the government's policy or law like what has been done in Myanmar through MNCWA that dividing the gender role of both men and women in its policy.

The socio-cultural aspect, in this case, can also be related to religious belief. For instance, Buddhism the only one recognized religion in Myanmar; well-known with the Burmese Buddhism is considering women as spiritually lower than men, even the Buddhist nuns were considered below monks (Lian, 2015). The concept lies behind this belief called '*hpon*' defining the abstract quality upon the possession of morality and spiritual matters where women have the lesser degree than men (Grafilo, 2018). It is illuminating the way women are perceived by society and reinforcing the subordination of women over men. Being a good woman means abiding to behavioral restrictions taught in their religion. This belief is been practiced in society.

It is either the patriarchic norms or the Burmese Buddhism belief, to the greater extent becomes the root cause of the underdevelopment of women at all aspects in Myanmar, including the underrepresentation of women in Myanmar's Parliament. It is not only about these socio-cultural norms are shaping the way of other people perceived men and women in society with the expected gender roles, but also determining the way of each individual, particularly women in seeing herself – ambition and self-perception (Gender Equality Network, 2013). For instance, there are some women who have a good ambition and confidence to participate in politics, but their family most likely does not support them to contest in the election. It can also cause the women in Myanmar to downgrade themselves and making them less ambitious and less confident to enroll in the general election. It is even worse because the women herself do not interested in politics or might be losing their interest in to be the candidate (Gender Equality Network, 2017).

2. Educational Aspect

Education really matters for both genders in becoming the lawmaker in parliament. However, girls and women in Myanmar are being neglected to have equal opportunity on education despite it being guaranteed for all constitutionally (UNESCO, 2017). Myanmar's people are really valuing the education in its high expense of money because it increases the status of a person, but this is only applicable to boys and men. The girls and women have fewer opportunities or even have no chance to enjoy formal education. This situation is shaped by the culture preserved in the community. The cultural barriers discourage girl's education everywhere in Burma, particularly among all ethnic's group (Belak, 2002). The social and gender roles assigned to women as the culture preservers cause women to be excluded from public spheres, including the education. Education for girls and

women is being indoctrinated as less important, and on the other side encourage the boys and men for having a good education because men will be responsible for earning money for the family.

The socially-constructed restriction upon education for girls and women creates the imbalance educational level between men and women. The low educational level of women serves to disempower women away from effective political influence (Belak, 2002). Therefore, education does matter for the political participation of women because without education women's voices not even close to being heard in government (WEDU Global, 2018). It is only with education that women can be aware of what politics is and have leadership skills and experiences.

Education becomes one amongst other important variables for women to be able to join the election as the candidates. The survey conducted by The Asia Foundation on the 2015 election showed that women MPs are more educated than men MPs (Latt, Ninh, Myint, & Lee, 2017). Woman candidates need to acquire and achieve a higher level of education than their male counterparts so that they have more confidence to compete in the election. Although the fact women candidates are more educated than men and becoming more confident out of it, men keep dominating the parliament. If with the higher education level women remain struggling to involve in politics, then when women are less educated than men only results in the underrepresentation of women in parliament. This situation remains forever if the male-bias stereotypes that man does better than women to be a political leader still exist among Myanmar society. The women candidates get little amount of support from the voters, even from the female voters due to that male-bias stereotype (Gender Equality Network, 2017). Education plays an important role to reconstruct the gender-bias stereotyping in the society that the leadership capacity of a person is not

determined by gender. This indicates that education is an important catalyst for women to have a better confidence and to get support from the voters particularly the female ones; hence women candidate can win the election.

3. Economic Aspect

The economic aspect, in this case, refers to the financial condition of women when they are running in the election. The author reiterates the previous two aspects for having a connection to the economic aspect. First, the socio-cultural aspect which limits women's role for only staying at home and men's role to be the breadwinner is ultimately affecting the financial condition of women. As women are responsible for the household and the denial from society, women are facing unequal opportunities to work outside the home (Belak, 2002). What makes it worse is actually when women are given a chance to work outside home women still earn less money than men with the same jobs which only account for 70%-90% of what men earn (Baker, 2016). Second, the education aspect does matters in the attainment of women's career at work. As women are limited to access to education, women have a lower level of education than men in Myanmar at large. This makes women have no particular skills and capacity that they are expert in to have a job outside their home. Therefore, women are more likely than men to work in the industry that needs labor with cheap salary. Conclusively, the author argues that there is a connection between the socio-cultural aspect and education aspect as well as the economic aspect. The persistence of patriarchal culture restricts girls and women to access or enjoy the education causing the low level of education of women which further gives women less opportunity to work because they have no skills and capacity to do the work besides house chores.

Given this situation, it makes sense that women are struggling to participate in politics because women have

no resource, especially financially to support them in running the election (Gender Equality Network, 2017). Furthermore, women candidates are less likely than men to get the financial support from their families, relatives, or even political parties they are in. It is reported that women candidates were more likely than men in charge of the entire fund of their campaigns themselves (Gender Equality Network, 2017; The Carter Center, 2015). The limitation on financial resource becomes what prevents women from political participation in Myanmar.

4. Legal and Institutional Aspect

The legal and institutional aspect refers to the aspect coming from the government that rules the women's participation in the election. In this case, the author focuses on the adoption of the 2008 Constitution and its impact on other existing legal framework and institutions in Myanmar. Although the adoption of the 2008 Constitution in some fields have been notably relaxing and stabilizing the domestic situation to enable the democratic transition, women are still disadvantaged by the constitution in terms of their political influence.

First, the 2008 Constitution is still considered as a form of solidification of power from the military forces. The military forces are privileged to have 25% seats of the parliaments without the election. The male dominance in military forces leads to the unequal posture of parliament that favors men over women. Second, the constitution also designed the male-bias First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system. According to this system, all candidates are competing for a single seat which tends to result in fewer women being elected (Gender Equality Network, 2017). Third, the posture of established Union Election Commission as mandated in the constitution still makes women underrepresented in the commission (The Carter Center, 2015). Fourth, there are many of the existing political system are still in favor towards men

candidates than women candidates. Additionally, the traditional media coverage also somehow not takes the women side and support them in the election, but misinforms the profile of women candidates (Gender Equality Network, 2017).

The political party, in this issue, is an important platform for increasing the women's representation in parliament because women are unable to have a seat in parliament if they have no opportunity to be a member of political party and candidate for the MPs in the very first place. Most of the political parties in Myanmar excluded the women members through its complex membership requirements and selection.

Those four aspects, socio-cultural, education, economic, as well as legal and institutional aspects clearly prevent women to participate in politics. It is highly important to take action in addressing those obstacles to increase the representation of women in parliament in Myanmar. Therefore, in the next part in this chapter, the author describes the rise of local women's movement in Myanmar that aimed to struggle for women's rights in general and women's political rights in particular. There are three nationwide local women's movements explored in this undergraduate thesis, namely the Women's League of Burma (WLB), Gender Equality Network (GEN) and Women's Organization Network (WON).

D. The Rise of Local Women's Movement in Myanmar

The local women's movements were organized as it was aimed at breaking the status quo of women. Women as the most vulnerable group need to speak up so that they can be well-represented in society in all spheres in Myanmar at large. The situation when women are being disadvantaged out of the existing system and norm, there were some women who are aware of it and willing to address it. Thus, later there were several women's movements in Myanmar that aimed to be a part of the

solution. Speaking of the rise of local women's movement in Myanmar, it can be traced back along with the fight for political reform against the junta government. Prior to the nationwide protest in 1988, there were two organizations of women based in Karen and Mon States already established namely Karen Women's Organization (KWO) and Mon Women's Organization (MWO). In the series of mass protest and demonstration in the late 1990s, women were involved by joining the Burmese Housewives Association and the young women joined the All Burma Students' Democratic Front (ABSDF). According to Irrawaddy (2018), there were seven notable and remarkable women who were very contributive in the pro-democracy uprising. They are Ma Win Maw Oo, Ma Thandar, Hnin Pan Eain, Nan Khin Htwe Myint, Cynthia Maung, Daw Aye Aye Mar, and Ma Phyo Phyo Sung (The Irrawaddy, 2018). They risked themselves and strived for democracy even their life was at the expense. The uprising was not strong enough in realizing the political reform in Myanmar. In fact, the regime reasserted their control by imposing martial law. It is reported that women were violated physically and sexually by the Special Police (Women's League of Burma, 2007 in Hedstrom, 2013).

Later in the early 2000s, there was an initial movement to form a new women's group. In 1992, took in place in Karen State, the first organized women's meeting was held. Following the meeting, some women from various ethnic groups established the women's organizations, namely Karenni National Women's Organization (KNOW) in 1993, Burmese Women's Union (BWO) in January 1995, Women's Rights and Welfare Association of Burma (WRWAB) in February 1995, Tavoy Women's Union (TWO) in May 1995, and there were 3 women's organizations established in 1997 namely Chin Women's Organization (CWO), All Burma Democratic Lushai Women's Organization (ABDLWO) and Lahu Women's Organization (LWO). Those

women's organizations were pretty much located in the border areas and were majorly ethnic-based women organization (Women's League of Burma, 2011).

Meanwhile, two decades earlier, the international community had been progressively discussed the women's and gender issue outside Myanmar (UN Women, 2015). For the first time, Myanmar's women attended the worldwide conference on women in the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing and there were 2 women from BWU also attended the conference (Myanmar Women's Affairs Federation, 2003; Women's League of Burma, 2011; JICA, 2013). In the following years, the Government of Myanmar indeed followed the rule of law and established the MNCWA under the MSWRR and acceded to CEDAW in 1997. Apart from the government, women in Myanmar did not satisfy out of the ineffective effort from the government. Therefore, the initiative of BWU to hold nationwide women's forum for the existing women's organizations was possible to be held in 24-28 November 1998 in Chiang Mai. After the hardworking and tirelessly effort done by all the existing women's organizations back at that time had established the Women's League of Burma (WLB) in 1999 as the umbrella organization for 12 women's ethnic organizations.

The struggle of women was not stopped there, but it was just the beginning of another new hard work and effort to bring about a change in Myanmar concerning women's issues. The rise of local women's movement was very stagnant and WLB became the primary women's movement in the country until the Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar in 2008. The 2008 Cyclone Nargis was one of the most horrific natural disasters that ever hit Southeast Asia after the Aceh Tsunami in 2004. The report had informed that women were the most affected by the disaster as 61% of those who died were female (Macan-Markar, 2008). The Gender Equality Network (GEN) and Women's Organizations Network (WON)

were established in the following of Cyclone Nargis disaster management effort.

The establishment of local women's movements in Myanmar was evident as an effort by women particularly to speak up and struggle for their rights. Their efforts have been very essential to the advancement of women's status in Myanmar in all sectors, including their effort in increasing the women's representation in parliament that could have never been better than ever before. In regard to the topic of this thesis, the most significant effort by those local women's movements is the advocacy of women's representation in parliament though advocating those obstacles that faced by women to be a lawmaker in their running election. Later in the following chapter, the author describes how the process of advocacy of women's representation in parliament conducted by the three organizations of women namely WLB, GEN, and WON.